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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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I'm going to start right off by stating that my comments this week will be extremely short. It's been one helluva week. A number of family issues, both on my side and my wife's, have get us quite busy and stressed. My wife has been on the phone to her mother and sister all week, and me with my father. To top it all off, we had to drive to Maine this morning to pick up my father's and brother's dogs from the Animal Rescue League where they've both been "living" this past week because my brother wasn't around to care for them both, and my father not physically able to handle both. So, went went to take one of them and "dog-sit" him for a week or so. Fortunately, he doesn't have the mentality and behavior issues that his breed brings to people's minds - he's a young pit bull terrier. He's a terrific dog who acts like a little kid, looking for constant attention. And, he gets along with my two dogs quite well. He's at the bottom of the hierarchy here at the house, being "dominated" by my two "kids", which would surprise most people! It should be an interesting week or so. So, I'm really exhausted from the trip up and back, and then my wife and I trying to get him acclimated and relaxed here.

The one thing that I will mention is that I agree with Joe's comments both this week and last regarding getting out to vote. He's correct, it's your right and privilege to do so. Speak your mind by voting, so take it seriously.

Until next time...

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Atari-Users.Net

I moved the website to our new server last night. If anyone has access issue, please let me know.

If you are on one of our mailing list, those are still on the old server. Same thing.. let me know if you have issues.

Rob
webmaster@AUN

Atari Users Network
www.atari-users.net

Atari Talk Forums
www.atariforums.com

AtariForge
www.atariforge.org

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho, friends and neighbors. I don't really understand how I ruffled some feathers last week when I mentioned voting, voting machines and paper ballots. I got not one but two rather testy emails on the subject!...

YEAH BABY! NOW you're thinkin'! <grin>

I really AM trying to influence how you vote, I'm just not trying to influence WHO you vote for. That's your business. MY business (or at least my interest) is seeing that you and your vote count for something.

Now, those of you who don't live in the United States have been very gracious in not giving me hell for taking your time with these things. Perhaps you're genuinely interested in the process. Perhaps you skip ahead to the stuff from the UseNet, or perhaps you are amused at one facet or another of my seeming obsession on the subject.

That's as may be, but The Vote is something quite important. It's not only a right; it's a privilege. It's what makes the system work. It's our voice, our pledge and our promise. Whether or not you think the system works or have doubts about how well it works, it's probably the best system going.

As you can tell, I'm quite enthralled with this system. But as the sage Scotty said, the more they overthink the plumbing, the easier it is to stop up the drain. The system needs care and constant attention, for like any sophisticated system of any kind, neglect or abuse need to be corrected and monitored.

Heh heh, there I go again. Well, y'know what? There's one sure way to get me to shut up on the subject: Register and vote! <grin>

Okay, that's enough of that. Let's get to the news, hints, tips and info available on the UseNet this week.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Rob Mahlert of Atari-Users.Net posts this about the latest and greatest wiki anywhere on the 'net. <sorry, I couldn't resist>

"I've had it installed for a while, but never announced it.

If you'd like to help with the HighWire documentation, We now have a Wiki!

Very little has been setup on the wiki, which might be good for a fresh start on the documentation.

Check it out at http://highwire.atari-users.net/wiki "

Jean-Luc Ceccoli tells Rob:

"Well... there must be a problem then : this link is unreacheable with HighWire. Nothing displayed after 5 minutes at 8 Mb/s. Just « connecting to...» and the address of the page.

I tried with CAB 2.8 : the page displayed just one second later.
Tried with HighWire again : still the same, had to break after 15 minutes stating «Connecting to...».

A website that can't be accessed with the browser is is related to... it would be funny, if this browser didn't pretend to be a must!
Any chance this can be fixed quickly ?"

Martin Byttebier adds:

"The same here. HW can't get in. With Cab 2.8 no problem to get the page."

Rob checks things out and tells Jean-Luc and Martin:

"Try this direct link guys.

http://highwire.atari-users.net/wiki/index.php/Main_Page
No trailing slash!

and

http://highwire.atari-users.net/wiki/index.php "

Martin tries it and tells Rob:

"Both links doesn't work with HW 0.2.8

And HW 0.3.0 (Mintnet.ovl) gives me the same problem. I can’t get in."

Rob replies:

"Thanks Martin.

Guess We’ll have to see how close AltF4 is for the next release.."

Jean-Francois Lemaire does a little back-checking and tells Rob:

"Indeed, no access with HighWire 0.3.0. However, version 0.3.1 beta4 (CVS) accesses the wiki fine. I guess it’s time for a new release..."

Joakim Högberg adds:

"Seems so. I am using 0.3.1 beta 3 and it loads the wiki without probs too."

Someone started a thread about replacing hard drives on an STBook. If I’m reading the thread correctly, Dr. Uwe Seimet posted this about hard drive capacity:

"General problems with IDE drives bigger than 1 GB are unlikely because there is no IDE-specific limit at this size."

Werner Romstorfer asks Uwe:

"Wasn’t there a Atari-specific problem with drives (or partitions) bigger 1GB? They could’t address such big storage-devices, if I remember correctly."

Greg Goodwin tells Werner:

"There is a TOS specific limitation regarding partition size. Early STs had a limit of 256 MB per partition. Most other TOS versions have a limit of 512 MB per partition, except for the Falcon (4.0x) TOS which can access 1 GB per partition. MiNT (a multitasking TOS replacement) can go to the TB range. With 14 partitions possible, your ST Book can access 7 GB total via its built-in operating system."

Well folks, that’s it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Final Fantasy XII Launches!

Classic Games Hit The Spot!
Weighing In On 'Bully'!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Final Fantasy XII Launches at Digital Life

Mark your calendars: October 11th is officially Final Fantasy Day. At least it is in New York City, where media and fans alike turned out on Wednesday for the launch in Times Square of the long-awaited Square Enix RPG, Final Fantasy XII.

Daishiro Okata, president and COO of Square Enix, Inc., and Akitoshi Kawazu, the Executive Producer for Final Fantasy XII (along with a handful of cosplayers) were on hand to announce the launch of the game at the DigitalLife show this weekend, answer questions, and accept the highest honor the New York Tourism Bureau can bestow on a product and/or event: an arbitrary holiday.

Final Fantasy XII is (as the title implies) the twelfth game in the series that has held popularity and acclaim in the gaming world for nearly twenty years.

The previous game, the online-only MMORPG Final Fantasy XI, was released in 2003, and the last traditional single-player console entrant in the series, Final Fantasy X, came out in 2001. Gamers have been waiting for this sequel for a long time, and those at today's event were nigh-giddy to catch some glimpses of game footage and ask questions of the creators in anticipation of the game's release.

Final Fantasy XII hits stores on October 31, but booth #1422 at the Digital Life expo will feature a playable demo. Digital Life runs October 12-15 at the Jacob Javits Center in New York City. Check back throughout the weekend for more of our extensive coverage of the games, gadgets, and gear on display at Digital Life.

Classic Games Hit The Spot In New-Age Dazzle

In an age when the latest video games sport ultra-crisp graphics and cinema-like sound, there is still plenty of love for the good old-fashioned games just like Mom and Dad used to play.

Games such as "Pac-Man" and "Space Invaders" are enjoying a resurgence in popularity as technology gets cheaper and as new online services make it easier than ever to download and play.

"I'll tell you, the retro games really have resonated. They are some of our

top selling titles," said Greg Canessa, group manager of Xbox Live Arcade, Microsoft Corp.’s online service that lets users of its Xbox 360 console download casual games.

Fans are typically older players who grew up in the 1980s plugging pocketfuls of quarters into arcade games or who gave themselves blisters working joysticks on early home machines like the Atari 2600.

"Not to get too deep about it but 9/11 seemed to create a great level of nostalgia and cocooning, and had a deep effect on the American psyche," said Eric Levin, executive vice president of Techno Source, which makes a line of "plug and play" gaming devices.

But classic games - if that term applies to a medium that has only existed in mass market form for about 30 years - are also finding appeal among younger players.

Early games bear about as much resemblance to today’s top titles as a cave painting does to the Sistine Chapel. Compare the monochrome minimalism of "Asteroids" to the cinematic detail of "Halo 2."

Yet what was fun 25 years ago still holds appeal today. In the end, it’s all about the gameplay.

"You can take some of these games, which take a minute to learn but a lifetime to master, and you can play them with your kids," Levin said. "We’ve not only appealed to the people who had them as kids but we’ve attracted new players as well.

The technological law that boosts the power of microchips while lowering their cost means that a collection of games and hardware that would have cost close to $500 in 1980 can now be sold by Techno Source for about $10.

The company’s gadgets plug into a TV and are preloaded with 10 games, including console classics such as "Pitfall" and "Kaboom!" from Activision Inc.

Many old games have also been dusted off to play on today’s high-end game consoles from Microsoft, Sony Corp. and Nintendo Co. Ltd.

One example is "Intellivision Lives" published by Crave Entertainment - for the Xbox, PlayStation 2 and GameCube - packing 60 games from Mattel Inc.’s 1980 console and sells for $20.

The simplicity and low cost of retro games also makes them ideal to squeeze into portable devices like mobile telephones or even digital music players. Last month, Apple Computer Inc. said new versions of its iconic iPods would sport video games such as "Pac-Man" and geometric puzzler "Tetris."

Microsoft is cashing in on gaming nostalgia, but Canessa said it’s easy to forget that there were plenty of horrible games at the dawn of the industry.

"Most of those games, frankly, are fun for 5 or 10 minutes, but you kind of had a better impression of them back in the day than you do today," Canessa said. "We pick just the best games, the games that are as fun to play as they were 25 years ago."

Microsoft has rolled out a steady stream of classics, such as "Galaga," "Joust" and "Time Pilot," on Xbox Live Arcade, updating them with prettier

graphics, online play and support for high-definition televisions.

More games are sure to be in the pipeline as the definition of "retro" changes. Last month, Microsoft launched an Xbox Live Arcade version of "Doom," the 1993 classic that popularized the first-person shooter genre.

The efforts seem to be paying off. Canessa said Microsoft's data show that those who buy one game - priced from about $5 to $10 - usually end up buying nearly 5 games.

The efforts are not always met with universal praise. Some gamers complain that modern controllers, which sport multiple thumbsticks, triggers and buttons, mean the old games don't feel like they used to.

Although Microsoft is pushing online play as the future of gaming, it has found there are exceptions. When Canessa's team was working on "Pac-Man," they tried an online feature in which opponents would take turns playing.

"It was really kind of boring to have that over Xbox Live. That was lame," Canessa said.

Judge To Weigh In On 'Bully' Video Game

A circuit court judge in Florida said he would review the unreleased video game "Bully" on Thursday to determine if it should be sold to consumers under age 18.

The review was ordered after a complaint filed in the 11th Judicial Circuit Court by attorney Jack Thompson, long an outspoken critic of the video game industry, which accused "Bully" of being a "Columbine simulator" and inappropriate for children.

"Bully," scheduled to be released across the nation on Tuesday for the PlayStation 2 console, lets players act out the life of a 15-year-old student and decide how to deal with teachers and various social cliques at a boarding school.

"Bully" was created by Rockstar Games, known for its popular "Grand Theft Auto" crime sagas where players can choose to live by the rules or hijack cars and run down pedestrians.

A company spokesman had no immediate comment on the review.

In his complaint, Thompson said he is seeking to have the game's rating changed from "T," for teenagers age 13 and older. It also seeks to preemptively block the sale of the game in Florida by Rockstar's publisher, Take Two Interactive Software Inc., as well as retailers Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and GameStop Corp.

"How to plan your revenge and rehearse your bullying back strategies, that dynamic is something we don't need to be teaching," said Thompson, who hasn't seen or played the game.

Miami-Dade County Circuit Court Judge Ronald Friedman planned to review the game in his chambers with the help of a representative from Take Two, said Vera Weisbrod, the judge's legal assistant.

She didn’t know how long the process would take, but the game’s creators have said completing it could take upward of 30 to 40 hours.

Rockstar was embroiled in a ratings controversy last year with its game "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" after a hacker uncovered a hidden sex scene.

The game, originally rated mature for players 17 and older, was changed to an adults-only rating by an industry ratings group after the scene was disclosed. An updated version with the sex scene deleted was eventually distributed to retailers with a mature rating.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Google Snaps Up YouTube For $1.65B

Google Inc. is snapping up YouTube Inc. for $1.65 billion in a deal that catapults the Internet search leader to a starring role in the online video revolution.

The all-stock deal announced Monday unites one of the Internet’s marquee companies with one of its rapidly rising stars. It came just hours after YouTube unveiled three agreements with media companies in an apparent bid to escape the threat of copyright-infringement lawsuits.

The price makes YouTube, a still-unprofitable startup, by far the most expensive purchase made by Google during its eight-year history.

Although some cynics have questioned YouTube’s staying power, Google is betting that the popular Web site will provide it an increasingly lucrative marketing hub as more viewers and advertisers migrate from television to the Internet.

"We are natural partners to offer a compelling media entertainment service to users, content owners and advertisers," said Eric Schmidt, Google’s chief executive officer.

YouTube will continue to retain its brand, as well as all 67 employees, including co-founders Chad Hurley and Steve Chen. The deal is expected to close in the fourth quarter of this year.

"I’m confident that with this partnership we’ll have the flexibility and resources needed to pursue our goal of building the next-generation platform for serving media worldwide," said Hurley, YouTube’s 29-year-old CEO.

While most videos posted on YouTube are homemade, the site also features volumes of copyrighted material - a problem that has caused some critics to predict the startup eventually would be sued into oblivion, much like

the once-popular music-sharing site Napster.

But Hurley and Chen, 27, have spent months cozying up with major media executives in an effort to convince them that YouTube could help them make more money by helping them connect with the growing number of people who spend most of their free time on the Internet.

While Google has been hauling away huge profits from the booming search market, it hasn’t been able to become a major player in online video.

That should change now, predicted Forrester Research analyst Charlene Li. "This gives Google the video play they have been looking for and gives them a great opportunity to redefine how advertising is done," she said.

Investors applauded the possible acquisition as Google shares climbed $8.50, or 2 percent, to close at $429 on the Nasdaq Stock Market.

Several other suitors, including Microsoft Corp., Yahoo Inc. and News Corp., reportedly have discussed a possible YouTube purchase in recent weeks.

"This deal looks pretty compelling for Google," said Standard & Poor’s analyst Scott Kessler said. "Google has been doing a lot of things right, but they are not sitting on their laurels."

Google’s YouTube coup may intensify the pressure on Yahoo to make its own splash by buying Facebook.com, the Internet’s second most popular social-networking site. Yahoo has reportedly offered as much as $1 billion for Palo Alto-based Facebook during months of sporadic talks.

"Yahoo really needs to step up and do something," said Roger Aguinaldo, an investment banker who also publishes a dealmaking newsletter called the M&A Advisor. "They are becoming less relevant and looking less innovative with each passing day."

Selling to Mountain View-based Google will give YouTube more technological muscle and advertising know-how, as well as generate a staggering windfall for a 67-employee company that was running on credit card debt just 20 months ago.

Since Hurley and Chen founded the company in February 2005, YouTube has blossomed into a cultural touchstone that shows more than 100 million video clips per day. The video library is eclectic, featuring everything from teenagers goofing off in their rooms to William Shatner singing "Rocket Man" during a 1970s TV show. The clips are submitted by users.

YouTube’s worldwide audience was 72.1 million by August, up from 2.8 million a year earlier, according to comScore Media Metrix.

YouTube’s conciliatory approach with major media has recently yielded several licensing and promotional agreements that have eased some of the copyright concerns while providing the company with some financial breathing room until it becomes profitable.

To conserve money as it subsisted on $11.5 million in venture capital, YouTube had been based in an austere office above a San Mateo pizzeria until recently moving to more spacious quarters in nearby San Bruno.

As its negotiations with Google appeared to near fruition, YouTube on Monday announced new partnerships with Universal Music Group, CBS Corp. and

Sony BMG Music Entertainment. Those alliances followed a similar arrangement announced last month with Warner Music Group Inc.

The truce with Universal represented a particularly significant breakthrough because the world's largest record company had threatened to sue YouTube for copyright infringement less than a month ago.

Li and Kessler expect even more media companies will be lining up to do business with YouTube now that Google owns it.

"It's going to be like, 'You can either fight us or you can make money with us,'" Li predicted.

Bin Laden Webmaster Arrested

Early Tuesday morning, reports started circulating that German police had arrested a man they had accused of being Osama bin Laden's webmaster. It was at that moment that I realized how different a war this is and how the Internet and particularly its multimedia-friendly Web component has truly changed all.

Imagine if during World War II, French law enforcement had arrested Hitler's speechwriter? But that's not even a clean analogy because a speechwriter would presumably help craft the message. This guy, identified in a Reuters report only as a 36-year-old Iraqi named Ibrahim R., is accused of being a programmer and of helping Bin Laden's Web sites stay up.

But even German authorities know that taking out one HTML wizard isn't going to cripple the terrorist kingpin with Page Not Found errors. It is, however, an admission that the Internet has become the world's best communication tool and that the code-mastering artisans who can handle that are delivering to people a weapon potentially more devastating then a dirty bomb.

Let's look at this from another perspective. In any other war, the ability to drive the enemy into hiding complete with TSA RFID systems and satellite ability to monitor and track cellphone communications would be an extremely effective way to isolate that leader and to prevent troops from being rallied and orders given.

The Internet changes all of that. It's been said that the U.S. often fights the immediately prior war, while creative, bloodthirsty and low budget terrorists are setting the terms for the next war. Allied forces had much superior weaponry and systems, but the enemy had much better PR, morale, community support and, apparently, better code jockeys. Maybe not better code jockeys, but they certainly embraced and used the Internet to a better advantage than have allied forces.

The Internet is a way to talk with the masses and that handled properly is a devastating tool. While smartbombs were being aimed at hideouts, why weren't American hackers overwhelming every Al Quaeda-friendly web site with denial-of-service attacks?

Yes, this is a very different war today. One where a handgun may be less effective than an HREF.

Google Offering Free Software Package

Google Inc. is making its word processing and spreadsheet programs available for free to all comers on its Web site, marking the Internet search leader’s latest effort to provide an alternative to Microsoft Corp.’s dominant software applications.

The software package, expected to be available Wednesday, combines a spreadsheet application that Google introduced in June with a word processing program called Writely that the Mountain View-based company bought for an undisclosed amount in March.

As part of the expansion, the Writely name will disappear. The new package will be called Google Docs & Spreadsheets.

Google also had been limiting usage of both the word processing and spreadsheet programs, but the company now expects to be able to accommodate anyone who signs up, said product manager Jonathan Rochelle.

Wednesday’s move continues Google’s attempt to assemble a suite of software applications that are tethered to an Internet connection instead of a single computer’s hard drive. That makes it easier for people to work on the same document from different locations, a convenience that is also meant to encourage more sharing among users with common interests or goals.

Qualcomm Plans To Set Eudora Free

Qualcomm said this week that it will release future versions of the Eudora e-mail program using the Mozilla Foundation’s open-source Thunderbird software as the platform, with the first version of the free software scheduled to debut in 2007.

Until that point, Qualcomm will continue to keep selling current versions of the application.

Qualcomm Senior Director of Corporate Communications Jeremy James said business incompatibility was the primary reason the company decided to move the software to an open-source platform.

"We decided not to remain in the e-mail market because it’s not in alignment with our core business or strategic goals," said James. "And while Eudora is very close to our hearts, our core business is wireless technology."

James said the company would continue to provide technical support for users of the current Eudora versions.

The Eudora e-mail program, developed in 1988, was once one of most-used applications in the world, but gradually lost users when free e-mail services, such as Hotmail and Yahoo Mail, became popular. In addition, the increasing popularity of applications bundled with operating systems, such as Microsoft’s Outlook Express and Apple’s Mail, was also a reason for Eudora’s decline.

Qualcomm launched the last commercial editions of Eudora, version 7.1 for

Windows and 6.2.4 for Mac OS X, earlier this week. These versions cost $19.95.

The move to a Thunderbird-based open-source platform will offer Eudora some key infrastructure improvements, including a cross-platform code base and an improved display engine, according to the company.

"The goal is not only to maintain as much as possible the features and user experience, but also to use the open-source community to continue to evolve the software," said James.

James also noted that for years the company had received many request to release a Linux version of Eudora. Now, the move to open source will make that possible. "This is a way for us to maintain our commitment to our loyal customer base," said James.

Steve Dorner, the original developer of Eudora and now vice president of technology for Qualcomm's Eudora group, said the move to open source would take the e-mail client in a new direction.

"Using the Mozilla Thunderbird technology platform as a basis for future versions of Eudora will provide some key infrastructure that the existing versions lacked, such as a cross-platform code base and a world-class display engine," Dorner said in a statement. "Making it open source will bring more developers to bear on Eudora than ever before."

Yahoo's Pyramid Scheme Collapses

Yahoo has been forced to drop its pyramid scheme after Mexican officials nixed the idea of the search giant using the Teotihuac n archeological site for its "time capsule" project.

Only a day after the Sunnyvale, Calif.-based company announced plans to use the pyramid on the site as a platform to blast a digital time capsule by laser into space, Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) canned the idea.

"We were working closely with Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History to evaluate all the technical and operational details," said Meagan Busath, a Yahoo spokesperson. Busath said both organizations came to the same conclusion after considering everything involved with the complex project.

Mexican officials had voiced concerns that the project could possibly cause damage to the 2,000-year-old Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuac n, which is located about 30 miles northeast of Mexico City.

Busath said Yahoo is still "sorting out all the details" but expects to find a new location soon. She couldn't say whether the launch would take place elsewhere in Mexico or back in the United States.

Yahoo began collecting text, images and sounds submitted by visitors to 20 of its Web sites earlier this week. Until November 8, Yahoo users are invited to contribute photos, writings, videos and audio.

"The project is still moving forward," said Busath, although no launch date has been set.

This is the first time that digital data will be gathered and preserved for historical purposes, according to Yahoo.

The company expects to launch its time capsule into space through a digitized laser light beam, supposedly sending information about today's culture on Earth light years away in an attempt contact extraterrestrial life.

The streaming digital media from the Yahoo time capsule will be converted to pulses of coherent light and projected into deep space using a high-power, diode-amplified neo-dynamin YAG Laser. The data conversion will take place using a fiber optic transmission source to the laser, which will transmit the data at a rate of about 5.5 KHz with a 250 Nano Second Pulse Width, according to Yahoo.

Not surprisingly, the company was unable to provide details on how other cultures could receive and decipher the information.

While many are left to conclude that the whole project is nothing more than a publicity stunt, co-founder and "chief Yahoo" Jerry Yang still gives the whole effort a positive spin.

"Wherever people use Yahoo - from Mexico, Germany or China to the U.S. - we want them to represent their culture and show us what's important to them by participating in this historic Internet time capsule event," says Yang. "It will be fascinating to see what people submit as their part of this 2006 snapshot, which will be shared with generations to come."

Youths No Longer Predominant At MySpace

It's not all youths on MySpace. Half of the site's users are 35 or older, according to comScore Media Metrix's analysis of its U.S. Internet traffic measurements. Only 30 percent are under 25 despite a common belief that the site is mostly populated with kids and young adults.

Just a year ago, teens under 18 made up about 25 percent of MySpace, the popular online hangout run by News Corp. That's now down to 12 percent in the comScore analysis released Thursday.

By contrast, the 35-54 group at MySpace grew to 41 percent in August, from 32 percent a year earlier.

"This analysis confirms that the appeal of social-networking sites is far broader," said Jack Flanagan, executive vice president for comScore, adding that the data suggest that social networking is becoming mainstream.

Sites such as MySpace encourage their users to stay in touch by offering tools such as message boards, photo sharing and personal profile pages. Members can expand their networks by adding other users as friends and, in turn, connecting with their friends.

The study was based on comScore's regular panels for measuring Internet audiences, rather than MySpace's registration information, where users often lie about their age.

ComScore also reported that MySpace had 56 million unique U.S. visitors in

August, much less than the 100 million-plus registered users MySpace has worldwide. The company has said about 10 percent of its users are abroad. A better explanation for the gap is the fact that many people have multiple profiles, each counted separately by MySpace but not by comScore.

Facebook, meanwhile, had 15 million unique visitors, Xanga 8 million and Friendster 1 million, according to comScore.

Of the four social-networking services studied, Xanga skews youngest, with 20 percent of its users under 18 (though MySpace and Facebook both had more under-18 users overall given its larger size). Facebook, which started as a hangout for college campuses, had the biggest share among those 18 to 24. Friendster and MySpace had high appeal among the 25 and up.

Flanagan said the analysis shows each site occupying a slightly different niche, allowing all to coexist rather than compete.

"MySpace.com has the broadest appeal across age ranges, Facebook.com has created a niche among the college crowd, Friendster.com attracts a higher percentage of adults, and Xanga.com is most popular among younger teens," he said in a statement.

The numbers, however, do not reflect Facebook’s recent relaxation of eligibility requirements. Before, users generally had to be part of a college or high school network, although some companies and organizations were later added. Starting last month, a user only needs a valid e-mail address.

Spamhaus Domain Name Under Fire

The world’s largest antispam group is warning that a deluge of spam could be on its way to computers around the world if a U.S federal court follows through on its threat to strip the group of its domain name.

The UK-based Spamhaus Project, which has long been one of the Internet’s main bastions of defense standing between spammers and e-mail inboxes, expects a federal judge in Chicago this week to strip the organization of its domain name for failing to comply with an $11.7 million judgment.

"If the domain [spamhaus.org] got suspended, it would be an enormous hit for the Net," said Steve Linford, chief executive officer of Spamhaus. "It would create an enormous amount of damage on the Internet."

The order was filed by U.S. District Judge Charles Kocoras after Spamhaus refused to comply with a September ruling that required the organization to pay $11.7 million to e360insight - an Illinois-based e-mail marketer that claims it was inappropriately blacklisted by Spamhaus.

Linford said that if the domain name is stripped from the organization, the Internet could see an additional 50 billion junk e-mails each day. Many Internet networks rely on the Spamhaus blacklist to decide when to block e-mails, filter them, or accept them.

Spamhaus refused to defend itself in the Illinois court, saying it believes the U.S. has no jurisdiction over its operations. Spamhaus also said it feared that appearing in court would open it up to all types of litigation from spammers who might want to fight being placed on the group’s

blacklist.

The nonprofit’s only U.S. asset is its domain name. Because the United States operates the domain name system for major top-level domains, it has the ability to seize domain names.

According to Spamhaus, more than 650 million Internet users - including the White House, the U.S. Army, and the European Parliament, among others - use its blacklist system to filter unwanted bulk e-mail.

For its part, e360insight said the ruling confirms its belief that "Spamhaus.org is a fanatical, vigilante organization that operates in the United States with blatant disregard for U.S. law."

Internet analysts have said that even if the court moves forward with a decision to strip the organization of its domain name, the Net likely will not see an increase in spam because the Spamhaus blacklist is available online and another group could take over and maintain the list.

ICANN: We Can’t Shut Down Spamhaus

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), said in a statement Wednesday that it does not have the ability or authority to comply with a proposed court order that it suspend the Internet service of the Spamhaus Project. Spamhaus is a volunteer-run antispam service.

In a proposed order last Friday, Judge Charles Kocoras of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois called on the organizations responsible for registering the Spamhaus.org Internet address to suspend the organization s Internet service. Both ICANN, the nonprofit organization set up to manage the domain name system of the Internet, and Toronto-based Tucows, the Spamhaus.org registrar, are named in the order.

The court threatened to shut down Spamhaus for ignoring an $11.7 million judgment against it. The proposed order followed a Sept. 13 ruling in which Spamhaus was required to pay damages and stop listing an e-mail marketing company called E360Insight in its database of known spammers.

Spamhaus, based in London, has said that it ignored the judgment because it cannot be enforced in the U.K.

Even if ICANN were properly brought before the court in this matter, which ICANN has not been, ICANN cannot comply with any order requiring it to suspend or place a client hold on Spamhaus.org or any specific domain name because ICANN does not have either the ability or the authority to do so, the organization said.

ICANN said that in most cases only the Internet registrar with whom the registrant has a contractual relationship can suspend an individual domain name. Tucows officials could not be reached for comment.

ICANN said it plans to continue to monitor the situation.

McGruff Fights Cybercrime With New Site

McGruff the Crime Dog is going digital. The 26-year-old mascot is the centerpiece of the National Crime Prevention Council's new campaign to "Take a Bite Out of Cyber Crime." The Web site ByteCrime.org, formally launched Wednesday, offers a free, 36-page online brochure with tips.

"The message remains the same: Do your part to prevent crime before it occurs," said Ann Harkins, the council's vice president for programs. "You start with lights, locks and alarms to protect your home. Now the equivalent is security to keep the bad guys out in cyberspace."

On the site, McGruff challenges people to immunize their computers by installing anti-virus, firewall and other software. Discounts and free 30-day trials are offered through a partnership with security vendor McAfee Inc.

The brochure, aimed at individuals and small businesses, covers a variety of dangers online - from malware to sexual predators - and the tools and techniques available for protection. It also addresses special situations, such as surfing the Web from public terminals at cybercafes or telecommuting into office networks.

Privacy Options Limited For Net Services

If you don't like what your favorite Internet search engine or e-commerce site does with information it collects about you, your options are limited to living with it or logging off.

Major search engines, for instance, all keep records of your searches for weeks, months or even years, often tied to your computer's Internet address or more. Retailers, meanwhile, generally presume the right to send marketing e-mails.

Although online companies have become better at disclosing data practices, privacy advocates say the services' stated policies generally don't give consumers real choice.

"None of them have gotten to the point of giving a lot of controls in users' hands," said Ari Schwartz, deputy director of the technology watchdog group Center for Democracy and Technology. Privacy policies "are about notice ... not about control."

Recent developments - from companies losing laptops containing sensitive data to Time Warner Inc.'s AOL releasing customers' search terms - have again turned the spotlight on Internet privacy.

But the push for stronger federal protections is countered by Attorney General Alberto Gonzales' desire to require Internet providers to preserve customer records to help prosecutors fight child pornography. Officials have released few details, though they say any proposal would keep the data in company hands until the government seeks a subpoena or other lawful process.

Federal law already limits how personal financial and health care data may be used, but U.S. privacy laws are generally considered weak compared with Europe and Canada.

Industry groups have stepped in with guidelines that go beyond legal requirements.

One group, Truste, requires member companies such as AOL and Yahoo Inc. to give consumers a way to decline sharing personally identifiable information with outside parties. Companies also must disclose any use of tracking technology and specify personal information collected and how it is used.

"The fact that we don't license every person on the Internet gives consumers (the ability) to shop around," said John Tomaszewski, Truste's vice president for legal, policy and compliance. "We've got folks out there engaging in a higher standard than what is normally required."

Some companies go even further.

E-Loan Inc. customers worried about safeguards when data get outsourced to India can choose to have loan applications processed domestically, though loans in such cases would take two additional days to close.

Mark Lefanowicz, E-Loan's president, said about 80 percent of customers have agreed to outsourcing, and he said choice pre-empted any backlash.

"They have the right to deal with us under their terms," he said. "If we just disclosed we used an overseas provider, for a lot of customers it's irritating to them."

Comcast Corp., meanwhile, gives customers a range of options on how long its servers keep e-mail, while a small search engine called Ixquick promises to purge data within 48 hours.

In other cases, companies have responded to backlash from customers. When Facebook recently allowed easier tracking of changes their friends make to personal profile pages, users threatened boycotts and forced the company to apologize and offer more privacy controls.

But such cases are rare. Consumers generally haven't demanded better privacy options the way they shop around for better prices or ease of use, said Carl Malamud, senior fellow at Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank.

"As a consumer I don't choose based on practices for privacy," he said. "I choose based on functionality, and many consumers do the same."

So Google Inc. remains the leading search engine, even as it won't say how long it keeps data on what people search. Like other companies, Google says such information is helpful in improving services and fighting computer attacks and fraud.

Tom Lenard of the Progress and Freedom Foundation, a technology think tank that shuns government regulation, added that data retention lets credit card companies identify unusual activities and gives car dealers the ability to offer instant loans.

Limiting what companies can do would hurt consumers, Lenard said.

Many companies already restrict data sharing on their own but stop short of a total purge.

"There is such a mantra built around the information economy and how valuable the information is of the user that companies don't want to give

that up," the CDT’s Schwartz said.

Lauren Gelman, associate director of Stanford Law’s Center for Internet and Society, said companies may not need all the data today, but they don’t want to limit their future options, either.

She and others worry that keeping data longer than necessary could lead to abuse.

Already, many companies have acknowledged data breaches from Web site hacks or stolen laptops. And this summer, an AOL researcher released three months’ of search terms on more than 650,000 subscribers without clearing it with superiors.

Jason Catlett, founder of the privacy group Junkbusters Corp., said individuals ought to have more opportunity to see, edit and delete records companies have on them. In many cases, he said, customers couldn’t easily purge credit card numbers or their accounts entirely once they register with personal information, often a requirement just to make a single online purchase.

"There’s still a lot of diversity in information practices," he said, "but there has been a convergence to what the average person would consider too low a standard."

Gelman said companies have little incentive to promise more.

"We’re stuck where we have privacy policies that are basically written to the lowest common denominator," Gelman said. "Companies learn the only way they can get into trouble is to say they are doing something and then do something different. So they say they are allowed to do anything with the data to cover their butts."

Technology The Boss Uses To Spy on You

Privacy... what privacy? Electronic eyes and ears lurk everywhere, from NSA satellites plucking phone conversations out of thin air to strategically placed video cameras silently recording the comings and goings in all kinds of venues, from schools to sporting events.

Employers today are also using all sorts of ingenious technologies to keep tabs on their rank and file. Anyone who thinks their work activities are private has probably been sleeping under the proverbial rock and is in for a rude awakening. Many employers today watch everything employees do, from email to Web surfing to chats at the watercooler.

Video surveillance technology, in particular, is improving rapidly and providing cautious managers - as well as suspicious bosses - with a snooping arsenal sophisticated enough to make a CIA spook blush. And the technology is getting less expensive all the time, so a business doesn’t need to be listed on the Fortune 500 to afford the latest in video surveillance gear.

Yes, video surveillance today is both possible and affordable. But, how does it work, and ultimately, is it the right thing to do? Most people cringe at the thought of being watched by their employers. So, where do employer rights end and employee rights begin? Let’s take a look.

Traditional video surveillance systems use videotape, so getting useful information out of them usually means wading through hours of uneventful video to locate a few minutes - or seconds - of critical information. Also, traditional CCTV (closed-circuit TV) systems use VCRs and, most recently, Digital Video Recorders (DVRs) to store video feeds from cameras. Although these two technologies are "good enough" for recording surveillance video, they are rapidly being replaced by something far better.

Newer IP-based video surveillance systems store video digitally on networked computers, which makes remote monitoring from almost anywhere a cinch. The boss might be vacationing in Hawaii, but as long as the local watering hole has an Internet connection, keeping tabs on the office is as easy as browsing to a secure Web site and typing a password.

IP video surveillance provides digital files readily available to all authorized users, plus system accessibility from any networked computer via a Web browser, and the ability to digitally manipulate video feeds as needed. So, those who get way too toasted at the company Christmas party can now look forward to having their exploits digitally recorded for the entire company to see.

"Organizations today want the same kind of flexibility from their video surveillance systems as from any other networked application," says Keith Drummond, CEO of LenSec, a Houston-based developer of enterprise-wide video surveillance systems. And, he adds, IP systems for surveillance can now work together with burglar alarms, as well as manufacturing process monitors, and other types of support systems.

"In that sense," says Drummond, "video surveillance systems become the eyes of all other facility management systems, such as access control, elevator management, air conditioning, etc."

Brings a whole new meaning to the old saying: the walls have ears.

LenSec’s own IP surveillance systems vary a great deal in terms of customization and available configurations. But, says Drummond, everything starts with the number of cameras. "The cost of the system is driven by the type and quantity of cameras purchased by the customer and the amount of video they want to be able to archive." As a rule of thumb, Drummond says, "system pricing starts at $3,000 per camera for an entire turnkey solution, which includes system design, installation, and ongoing maintenance and support."

Another company, Axis Communications, can help answer the prayers of those who lust after an IP video system but already have a king’s ransom invested in a traditional CCTV system. The Axis 240Q Video Server eliminates the need for videotape by digitizing analog video feeds using motion JPEG video streaming. And, since the server is connected to the enterprise LAN, the digitized video is readily available to all authorized network users.

You know a market is heating up when Cisco enters the game. The venerable manufacturer of network hardware offers now also offers IP surveillance systems based on its Intelligent Information Network architecture. These Cisco systems include Video Surveillance IP Gateways that encode and decode video using MPEG-4 compression and provide connectivity for analog cameras. Related components of the system include the Cisco Video Surveillance Integrated Service platform which records up to 12 different video feeds and provides up to 4.4 terabytes of storage. There’s also the Cisco Video Surveillance Stream Manager Administration and Monitoring software which

provides system configuration, recording, switching and monitoring (the monitoring is done via a PC client-installed application).

A fourth contender offering enterprise video surveillance options is WebEyeAlert. Their Network Video Recorder application runs on a client PC and can record video from up to 128 network cameras. WebEyeAlert software uses the existing IP network to move recorded video around. It also allows users to configure individual cameras for settings like the FPS (frames per second) rate, recording mode, resolution, motion detection sensitivity, etc. The Smart Search capability allows users to zero in on specific activities. Video clips of interest can be exported to removable USB drives, CD writers, printers, and can also be automatically attached to email messages for distribution.

The news is bleak for those who cringe at the prospect of being constantly watched by their employers. Most legal experts agree that current laws are heavily stacked in favor of The Boss.

Parry Aftab, an attorney and expert on cyberlaw, cybercrime and Internet safety, as well as privacy issues, says, "Employers can monitor all they want as long as they let employees know. Monitoring is only off-limits in places where a presumption of privacy exists, such as bathrooms, locker rooms, etc."

Leonard Maltby, president of the National Workrights Institute, says there is never a legal problem monitoring open areas, but also agrees that sensitive areas such as bathrooms and locker rooms are off-limits. While only California and Rhode Island have statutes on the books that specifically prohibit the installation of cameras in sensitive areas, says Maltby, every state has common laws based on previous legal precedents that prohibit the use of cameras in such areas.

"In any state of the Union," says Maltby, "if an employer puts a camera in a bathroom or locker room they’re asking for trouble." Of course, most people don’t need a legal opinion to reach the conclusion that installing electronic peeping Toms in restrooms is a really bad idea. But, there is always someone somewhere willing to test the boundaries of good taste and legality. Hence the need for statutes that spell it all out.

What is really troubling, says Maltby, is the fact that it’s become so cheap and easy to spy on people using video cameras. Before, he explains, video monitoring was difficult and expensive. Not too many employers went to the trouble of installing such systems unless they had a good reason. "Now, video surveillance equipment has become so accessible and inexpensive that people are using it without giving it much thought."

So, the office tyrant may be just a phone call away from acquiring a state of the art digital video surveillance arsenal. And there is little or nothing the rank and file can do to stop it. "The bottom line," says Aftab, "is employers can do anything they want as long as they inform employees." And she cautions that, "in some states, employers are not even required to inform employees about monitoring."

Both experts agree on one point: Employees should be informed about video surveillance and stay away from surreptitiously installing cameras without employee knowledge.

"When employees find hidden cameras, it can cause anger and loss of productivity, especially when employers don’t have a good reason or explanation for installing the cameras," says Maltby. "If you conduct video

surveillance, do it for a good reason."

Parry Aftab concurs. "It's a matter of full consent and informing people. As long as employees are informed of the practice, it's acceptable to use video surveillance."

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, security concerns became paramount for many government and private organizations. And why not? No one wants another terrorist attack. But at the same time, many civil liberties watchers are concerned about sacrificing fundamental privacy rights at the altar of security.

Certainly there are many people who aren't too keen on constant government or employer surveillance, be it video, electronic, or telephone. Of course, video surveillance is just one part of a huge and contentious debate that's going to keep policy makers, as well as I.T. departments, busy for years to come.

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